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AUTHOR Hanson, J. Robert; Silver, Harvey F.
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ABSTRACT

The findings of an assessment of urban student needs conducted by the Design Center of the New Jersey Department of Education on 155 urban educators and residents is presented in this document. The assessment activities took place within the context of an urban education conference sponsored by the New Jersey Department of Education, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Interstate Planning Project, and the Educational Improvement Center, Northeast. This post-assessment activity report also provides information for the conduct of a need assessment. The assessment activity is an "open" model, i.e., needs are solicited on the basis of the individual respondent's concerns, and are not based on a listing of multiple needs from an external source. Results show that eight of the nine responding groups cited basic skills as the most critical of all urban student needs. (Author/AM)

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An Urban Student-Based Needs Assessment

New Jersey Design Center
December, 1976

J. Robert Hanson
and
Harvey F. Silver

UD 016 780

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An Urban Student-Based Needs Assessment

J. Robert Hanson & Harvey Silver

Introduction

In December of 1976 the Design Center of the New Jersey Department of Education prepared and executed a needs assessment activity with 155 urban educators and residents. The assessment activities took place within the context of an urban education conference sponsored by the New Jersey Department of Education, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Interstate Planning Project, and the newly organized Educational Improvement Center, Northeast.

This post-assessment activity report has been prepared both to share the findings of the assessment of urban student needs, and to provide information for the conduct of other similar type assessments. Personnel critical to the success of the assessment are listed in Appendix G.

Rationale

The assessment of student needs in an urban setting is, at best, a complex undertaking. Everyone who works with learners in an urban setting has his/her own conscious and subconscious perceptions of what urban students really need in order to learn, and to lead productive lives upon leaving public schooling. It was the authors' contention that these multiple perceptions were potentially more significant for planning purposes than the myriad research findings that few educators know about and even fewer apply. To bring to the surface, therefore, the perceptions of urban educators relative to the needs of students has the following advantages: 1) the individual respondent consciously focuses on his/her perceptions of students' needs and prioritizes them into three statements of need; 2) constituencies then meet to jointly consider which of the multiple perceptions submitted have the greatest need or highest severity; and 3) all of the constituencies' prioritized needs are analyzed both in terms of those recurring needs across constituencies with both high frequency of occurence and high

severity. High severity was a perception of the need's negative impact on the urban learner.

Additionally, unlike many needs assessments, the activity was focused not on educational methods, processes and program suggestions, but on the needs of the urban learner, per se. The respondent was requested to list his/her prioritized needs in terms of the studentswith whom the person worked, lived or had frequent contact. The focus on the needs of students was protected by asking respondents to use a preprinted form when writing his/her three critical needs statements. Please see Appendix A, page 2. Of the 465 needs statements submitted less than six had to be discarded because they were program focused.

This assessment activity is in the jargon of goal-setting procedures, an "open" model, i.e., needs are solicited on the basis of the individual respondent's concerns, and are not prioritzied from a listing of multiple needs from an external source (the so-called "closed" model). As an open model one can hypothesize that the perceived needs of urban students represent the conscious choices or educated guesses of the respondents. Additionally, for each need submitted the respondent was asked to list as many indicators as seemed pertinent to substantiate that need for his/her own thinking.

Finally, the respondents filled out the form (Appendix A) after having heard conference speakers discussing numerous implications of the problems of urban learners. While this "pre-hearing" may potentially have had the impact of surfacing needs for the respondents' thinking so many needs were identified in the speeches that the respondent still had to think through and prioritize those needs of greatest significance for his/her own experience.

The findings of this assessment, then, represent a cross section of opinion on the part of many constituencies that are not only concerned about urban learners, but that also have specific experience and involvement in urban education. The size of the sample (155 respondents), the number of responding constituencies (9)

and the resulting perceptions provide an initial stepping off point for planning programs addressed both to the perceptions reported, and to possibly salient needs ignored. Also, the data can be anlyzed in terms of a specific need, a constituency's own corporate perceptions of the most severe needs, and, of course, of all the needs across all the constituencies. With additional information from other research studies offering more quantifiable data, and the interpretations of the meaning of the data from this sudy, the State's Urban Education Observatory and the 28 urban districts have increased baseline data from which to plan responsive urban education programs.

Methodology

The procedures for conducting the assessment were as follows:

1) Respondents completed a form listing three needs perceived as critical for urban learners with whom they had contact or about whom they had knowledge.
2) Needs were listed by constituency, edited, clarified or amalgamated with identical or similar needs, and frequencies of the occurrence of the need were computed.
3) Constituencies met as groups to discuss needs submitted (see Appendix B) and to rank needs for severity. All needs were then plotted (see Appendix C) for frequency and severity.
4) Staff then entered all needs from all constituencies by category of need (Appendix E) and ranked the needs in numerical order from most important to least important. Please see directions for group facilitators (Appendix D). The staff then completed the tally sheet for all constituencies (Appendix F).

Analysis of the Data

The nine constituency's needs were broken down by the number of individual needs in a given classification, and by the quadrant (see Appendix C) within which those needs were plotted. The quadrant in which the need falls in Appendix C is indicated by a Roman Numeral. For example, of the 29 needs statements addressed to "Basic Education" by Superintendents and Central Office Staff all 29 were plotted in the fourth quadrant (IV) indicating the group's judgements about both the high frequency and high severity of the need. Similarly, basic skills needs were cited by eight of the nine responding groups as the most critical of all learner needs. Overall, 34% of the needs submitted fell in this class. The only constituency indicating no needs in this area were the students.

The needs cluster as follows:

Need	Total % Response	# of Constituencies Responding	Total Needs	Rank Order of Need
. Proficiency in basic skills, i.e., reading and computation	34%	8	113	1
. Establishing positive/improved learner self-concept	24%	7	90	2
. Curriculum relevant to learner needs and environment	19%	6	49	3
. Career training and planning	11%	8	45	4
. Development of a more humane learning environment	09%	8	43	5
. Develop of coping or life adjustment skills	04%	2	18	6
. Skill development in learning to make better decisions	03%	4	16	7

. Improved communications/ interactions between school personnel and parents/families	.03%	5	12	8
. Selection of motivational goals for life skills	.03%	3	12	8
. Accelerated learning in skills addressed to valuing and socialization	.03%	5	12	8
. Improved guidance servicers for learners	.002%	3	7	9
. Learning to function independently in work and study	.01%	2	5	10
. Improved structure for imposing discipline	.01%	3	5	10
. Improved use of leisure time	.006%	1	3	11
. Learning an additional language	.006%	2	3	11
. Improved health and nutrition	.002%	1	1	12
. Delivery of integrated educational services	.002%	1	1	12

The five greatest needs in terms of quadrant IV frequencies suggest a set of interrelated concerns for the development of goals, objectives, and programs. These five areas can also be further classified for program development purposes into the interrelated taxonomies of cognitive and affective levels of achievement. In short, there are two predominantly cognitive or content centered sets of needs (i.e., basic skills and relevant curriculum) buttressed by three supportive and predominantly affective sets of needs (i.e., postive self-concept, career planning and training, and the development of a humane learning environment). A fascinating omission in this initial set of five needs clusters is physical skills mastery or the psychomotor domain. Clearly, no learning gestalt can be complete that overlooks the critical role physical skills proficiency plays in positive self-concept, improved peer relationships, the ability to think clearly, and general mental

health.

Some interesting discussion may be evoked from the non-responding groups relative to the first five needs clusters. For example, the student group did not specify needs for four out of the five highest needs. It is improper to draw too many conclusions from the students' data since that constituency was so small (5 or 3% of the total respondents). Nonetheless it is interesting that they perceived their needs as clustering in career training and planning, improved skills in decision-making, and, especially, a more humane learning environment.

Other omissions are potentially more instructive. For example, both sets of teacher respondents omitted training in decision-making in terms of urban learner needs. Both parents and students omitted increased or positive self-concept as an urban learner need. This is a critical omission considering the intimate and interdependent relationships of these two constituencies. The high quadrant IV judgements of the other seven constituencies for this as the second greatest learner need requires further study.

Secondary teachers, students and state department personnel omitted (by title) the need for more pertinent and life relevant curriculum!

While it is understandable that elementary principals would exclude career training and planning it is interesting that elementary teachers did not overlook this need.

Interestingly, only the representatives from higher education neglected to submit needs in the area of a more humane and responsive learning environment.

Overall, elementary principals, parents/Board members, and State Department personnel tended to have the most inclusive or broadest views of learner needs.

Readers of the report are strongly encouraged to study the listing of actual needs statements submitted by individual constituencies, and to review the indicators submitted for a specific need to fuller understand the intent of the respondents. (see Appendix B)

Thus, in interpreting responses the reader is advised to compare the actual needs submitted, with the classification of the needs on the summary tally sheet.

Summary and Recommendations

This needs assessment activity is one way of examining our own perceptions about what learners need. In our judgement the relative absence of quantifiable indicators (on the response forms) for the needs submitted, the omission of psychomotor considerations overall, and the generally restrictive classifications of needs suggests the need for: 1)more quantifiable data on actual student needs, 2) a broader and more highly articulated construct or theory about the interdependencies of the three learning domains, and 3) a more inclusive and humane curriculum focused on the integration of the arts and sciences in terms more immediately responsive to the learner's needs.

Our recommendations for follow-up on this study include:

1. The actual need to learn more about what is currently being done in the schools as seen from the students' perspective...since their perceptions vary so significantly from those of the other respondents, as well as to learn more about what students feel they need to learn.
2. The need to explore the potential interrelationships of the prioritized needs, e.g., to conduct cross impact matrix studies on the results of providing resources in some areas of need, and not in others.
3. The need to design new and more manageable instructional systems focused on gestalt configurations responsive to particular learner groups, e.g., designing curriculum utilizing the findings of pertinent validated projects, and constructing objectives against integrated

learning domains. In this latter area the contributions of Lotas, Freire, and Hahn would be particularly appropriate.[1]

4. The need to secure quantifiable data on urban learners. Why is it that we have so little hard data on what is actually occuring in our educational programs in urban (c. non-urban) settings? Perhaps pilot districts utilizing the T & E planning model could be financially assisted under various funding sources to collect hard data against various theories on how students learn.
5. We need to identify resources and technologies for the analysis of the causes of urban learners' problems, e.g., to provide more systems training for pilot districts in T & E planning, management procedures, Fault Tree Analysis, MIS, needs assessment, networking, evaluation, etc.
6. We need to set up task forces to postulate the interrelationships of the needs addressed to a more humane learning environment, and to learn from those urban-based programs that have had successes in integrating these elements (e.g., Harlem Prep, the Parkway School, New York's P.S. 146 the Philadelphia Advancement School, IGE, etc.)
7. We need to develop banks of objectives referenced not only to our state product and process goals, and our minimum standards, but also, and more important, focused on integrated theories of learning pertinent to the urban learner's needs, environment, and school resources, and
8. Last, we need to prepare a directory or census of those validated

---

[1]
a) Alex Lotas' "Learning Styles and Curriculum (II), Chippewa Valley Schools, Mt. Clemens, Michigan
b) Kurt Hahn's Theories on self-concept through Outward Bound survival-type training skills.
c) Paolo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" as pertinent to urban students' motivational problems in reading and computation

projects that have been successful in addressing some (or all) of the needs identified in this assessment activity. Then, armed with improved instructional theory, a battery of strong and proven programs, statewide urban data that will assist us in focusing on our greatest learner needs, and a group of EICs ready to assist districts in the upgrading of teaching and management skills, we can launch a concentrated effort toward discovering how to better meet these critical learner needs.

Introduction

Sound educational planning requires a systematic assessment of the individual needs of students in urban classrooms. One critical step in this planning process is the collection and ranking of student needs as perceived by all the people who work and live with children. The focus of such a planning activity is on the learner, per se, or, as the Plowden Committee reported, ". . . at the heart of the educational process lies the child."

This needs assessment process is therefore focused on the conference participant's individual perceptions of the needs of learners in urban schools. It is, therefore, a client-centered data collection activity. It is, further, a systematic approach to the construction of baseline data that will provide guidance for urban educational planners in directing their resources to the needs of greatest priority for urban students.

Urban students' needs are myriad. The perceptions of the importance of those needs by citizens and educators are similarly myriad. Completing the Perceptionnaire activity will provide an initial body of data for the identification of critical student needs as perceived by conference participants. Program responses may then be focused on these highly ranked needs with improved student learning achievement as the specific objective.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE PERCEPTIONNAIRE

1. Identify your constituency by placing a check mark in the appropriate box for each of the three responses.
2. Before filling out the Perceptionnaire please consider the following questions:
   a. On the basis of my experience and perceptions what are the greatest needs of urban students that I have observed?
   b. Of these multiple needs which suggest themselves as the three most critical needs?
   c. What are the specific indicators/behaviors which substantiate for me the critical nature of these three needs?
3. After considering the three questions please complete the needs statement on the Perceptionnaire utilizing the following format:

   Students **do not / cannot / are not / require** _____

   _____

   _____

4. For each need statement please answer the following questions:
   a. On the basis of my experience and perceptions ____ % of students have this need.
   b. What are the behaviors/indicators substantiating this need?

   Please enter the indicators/behaviors data in the right hand column.

5. **Sample Response**

   1. Students **do not / cannot / are not / require** more meaningful input in decisions affecting their lives in school.

   Percentage of students observed having this need. 90%

   Indicators

   1.1 High incidence of discipline problems.
   1.2 Lack of respect for authority.
   1.3 Student alienation
   1.4 Irrelevant curriculum
   1.5 Boredom in class

Prepared by Dr. Robert Hanson and D. Harvey Silver, Design Center, Division of Research, Planning & Evaluation, New Jersey State Education Department. 12/9/76

PERCEPTIONNAIRE

ON

URBAN EDUCATION NEEDS IN NEW JERSEY

December 1976

Please check your constituency

☐ 1. Superintendent Central Office ☐ 2. Elementary Principal ☐ 3. Secondary Principal ☐ 4. Elementary Teacher/Specialist

☐ 5. Secondary Teacher/Specialist ☐ 6. Student ☐ 7. Parent/Citizen Board Member ☐ 8. State Education Department ☐ 9. Higher Education

Please list three (3) critical learner needs in the left column, and specific indicators or observable behaviors substantiating those needs in the right-hand column.

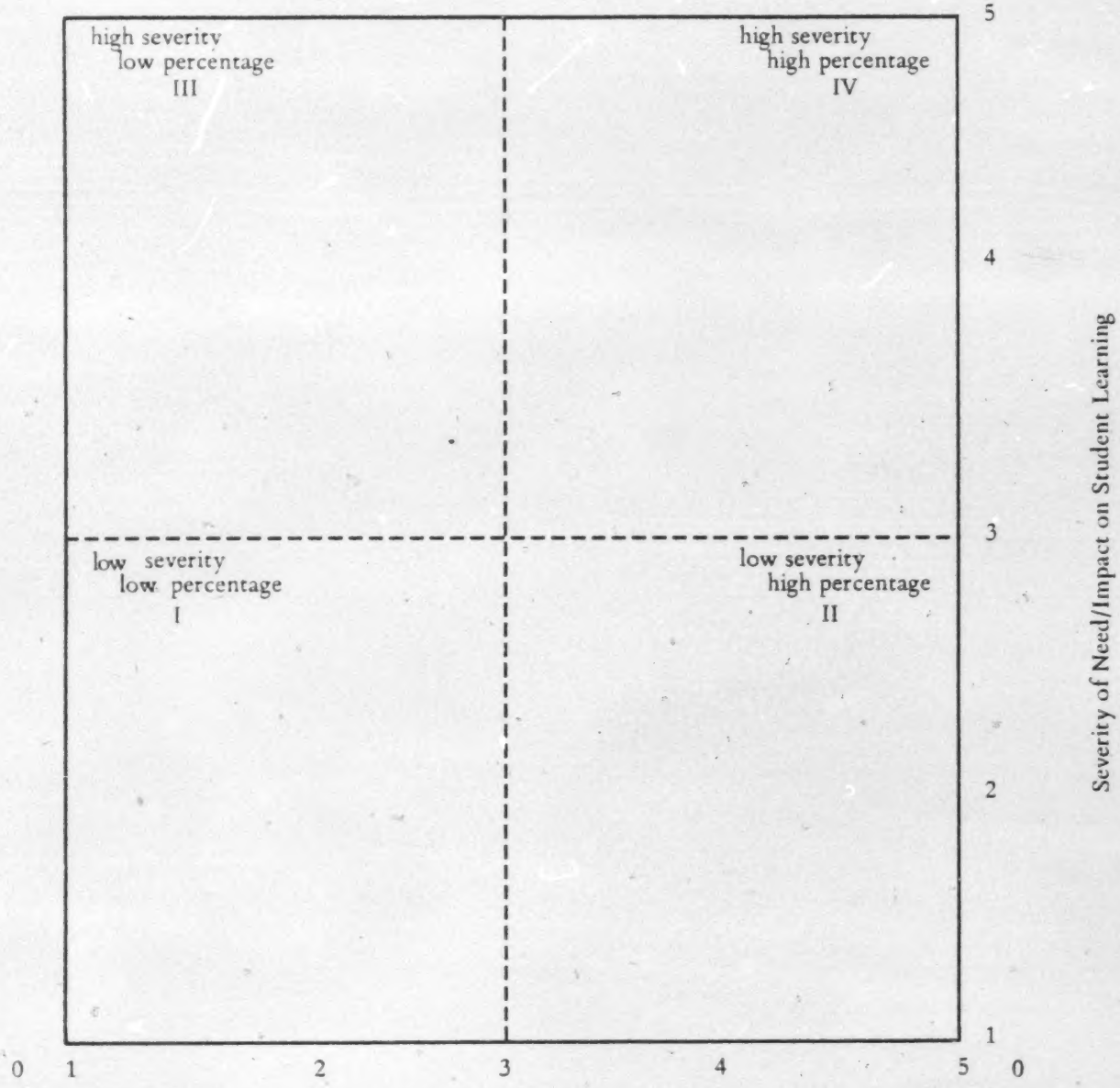
Learner/student based needs	Indicators/behaviors of this need
1. Students do not cannot are not require _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Percentage of students observed having this need _____%	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____
2. Students do not cannot are not require _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Percentage of students observed having this need _____%	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____
3. Students do not cannot are not require _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Percentage of students observed having this need _____%	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____

APPENDIX C

PLOTTING CHART

for

Rank Ordering Needs Statements*



APPENDIX D

MEETING #1 GENERATING NEED STATEMENTS

Thursday, December 9, 1:30 - 2:00

Setting

Large group of all participants

Objectives

1. Participants will complete the Perceptionnaire
2. Facilitators will compile complete list of categorized needs for each constituency.

Procedures	Time
	1:30 - 2:00
1. Introduce needs assessment process	5 min.
2. Explain procedures for completing Perceptionnaire	5 min.
3. Facilitators lead participants in completing Perceptionnaire.	20 min.
	2:00 - 4:00
4. Facilitators collect Perceptionnaires and sort according to constituency.	
5. Facilitators sort need statements according to overall categories.	
6. Facilitators delete duplicates and clarify ambiguous statements. (When eliminating duplicate needs statements compute the mean percentage for students who have the need and include all indicators that are not mentioned from duplicate needs statements.)	
7. Facilitators transfer needs statements, indicators, percentage values and incidence frequency (number of times the need is expressed) to constituency tally sheet.	
8. Return constituency tally sheet to workroom to be typed and duplicated for tomorrow's work session.	

MEETING # 2 PLOTTING NEED STATEMENTS

Friday, December 10, 11 - 12:30

Setting

Each of the nine constituencies participating at the conference will meet in a separate room. There will be a minimum of two facilitators for each constituency. The participants will be seated at round tables in groups of ten.

Objectives

1. Identify the severity of each need.
2. Plot the needs according to incidence and severity.
3. Rank order needs statements.

Procedures

	Time 11:00 - 12:30
1. Welcome participants	5 min.
2. Distribute constituency tally sheets (Explain that the needs statements on the tally sheets were compiled from their own constituency's completed Perceptionnaire done on Thursday)	5 min.
3. Cross introductions (three words that best describe you).	10 min.
4. Review constituency tally sheet with participants.	5 min.
5. Have the participants review their list and discuss the severity of each need.	10 min.

6. Put the severity and percentage scales on the board.

Severity Scale		Number Value	Percentage of Students who have the need		Number Value
Not severe	=	1	0-20%	=	1
Somewhat severe	=	2	21-40%	=	2
Severe	=	3	41-60%	=	3
Very Severe	=	4	61-80%	=	4
Most Severe	=	5	81-100%	=	5

Time

7. Using the severity scale have the participants indicate the severity of each need on their tally sheets — 10 min.
8. Have each table compute the sum of their severity scores for each need. (Add to weighted values of each participant at the table.) — 10 min.
9. Ask each table to call out their sum score for each need and compute a group severity mean. (Add each table's sum score and divide by the number of people in the total group. Round off the mean to the nearest whole number.) — 15 min.
10. After computing the group mean for each need, plot the need on the large plotting chart according to the percentage value and severity mean scores. — 10 min.
11. Rank the needs according to their coordinates.
    A. First by the Severity Coordinates
    B. If the Severity Coordinates are similar use the Percentage Coordinate to discriminate between needs.
    C. If both the Severity and Percentage Coordinates are similar, the needs will have the same rank. (The Severity Coordinate was used to rank the needs first because it was considered to be a more critical factor then the Percentage Factor.)
12. Have each table begin sharing possible solutions for reducing the critical needs.
13. Return your final constituency tally sheet and plotting board to the work room to be analyzed.

Ranking Example

Needs	Percentage Coordinates - Severity Coordinates		Rank
A	3	4	5
B	4	2	6
C	5	4	3
D	5	5	1
E	4	4	4
F	1	5	2
G	4	2	6

MEETING #3 PLANNING WORKSHOP SUMMARY
Friday, December 10, 2:00-2:30

Setting — Time

Large group of all participants.

Objectives

1. To present identified critical needs for all constituencies.
2. To identify similar and dissimilar critical needs for all constituencies.

Procedures

1.	Feed constituency responses into computer to analyze data.	2-2:30
2.	Present analysis using opaque projector and computer print out.	30 min.

URBAN CONFERENCE
NEEDS ASSESSMENT PLAN
December 9 and 10

	Activities	Time	Location	Responsibility
		DECEMBER 9		
1.	Introduce Needs Assessment Process	1:30 p.m.	Ballroom	Harvey Silver
2.	Facilitators Available for Technical Assistance	1:30 - 2:00 p.m.	Ballroom	Facilitators
3.	Participants Complete Perceptionnaire	1:00 - 2:00 p.m.	Ballroom	Participants
4.	Collect Perceptionnaires	2:00 p.m.	Ballroom	Facilitators
5.	Sort Need Statements According to Overall Categories	2:00-4:00 p.m.	Work Room	Facilitators
6.	Delete Duplicate and Clarify Ambiguous Need Statements	2:00-4:00 p.m.	Work Room	Facilitators
7.	Fill Out Constituency Tally Sheets	2:00-4:00 p.m.	Work Room	Facilitators
8.	Review Constituency Tally Sheets	4:00 p.m.	Work Room	Design Center
9.	Type Constituency Tally Sheets	4:00-6:00 p.m.	EIC/NE	EIC/NE
10.	Reproduce Constituency Tally Sheets	6:00-8:00 p.m.	EIC/NE	EIC/NE
		DECEMBER 10		
11.	Prepare Materials for Plotting and Ranking Activities	9:00 a.m.	Work Room	Design Center
12.	Pick up Materials for Plotting and Ranking Activities	10:30 a.m.	Work Room	Facilitators
13.	Complete Plotting and Ranking Activities	11:00-12:30 p.m.	Refer to Program	Facilitators Participants
14.	Return Completed Plotting and Ranking Materials	1:00 p.m.	Work Room	Facilitators
15.	Feed Data Into Computer for Analysis	1:00 p.m.	Work Room	Bob Hanson
16.	Present Analysis	2:00-2:30 p.m.	Ballroom	Harvey Silver Bob Hanson
17.	Distribute Copies of Analysis to Participants	2:30 p.m.	Ball Room	Design Center

FACILITATOR ASSIGNMENT

Superintendents

1. Trey Coleman
2. Virgil Engels
3. Nida Thomas

Parents - Board Members

1. Ronn Denner
2. Bill Cozzens
3. Jonas Miller

Secondary Principals

1. Bill Ten Eick
2. Greg Buontempo
3. Katie Gibson

State Education Departments

1. Jean Sadenwater
2. Tina Bernstein

Elementary Principals

1. Clara Scarborough
2. Paulette Bearer
3. Julia Hall

Higher Education

1. David Schuman
2. Carole Willis
3. Bill Kelly

Secondary Teachers

1. Ronald Brown
2. Sybil Nadel
3. John Palmer

Students

1. Kathy Brown
2. Joe Pascarelli
3. Marcellus Smith

Elementary Teachers

1. Micky Wilmer
2. Judy Kohlback
3. Arnold Ettinger

Analysis

1. Steve Koffler
2. Harvey Silver
3. Bob Hanson